


Self-Inadequacy in Daniel Caesar's Lyrics Album *Never Enough*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of self-inadequacy in Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* album, focusing on the songs "Ocho Rios," "Toronto 2014," and "Always." While previous studies often apply Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in a limited or descriptive manner, this research provides a more structured application of the hermeneutic arc as a systematic method. By focusing on textual autonomy, explanation, understanding, and the world of the text, the analysis reveals how linguistic and symbolic patterns construct feelings of inadequacy. The findings show that self-inadequacy appears in three dimensions: dependency in "Ocho Rios," temporal stagnation in "Toronto 2014," and emotional subordination in "Always." Ultimately, the lyrics construct a coherent "world of the text" where the subject lacks agency and relies on external validation. This study concludes that the selected lyrics serve as a structured narrative of modern vulnerability, demonstrating the potential of song lyrics as complex interpretive texts.

Keywords: *Self-inadequacy, Daniel Caesar, Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics, Song Lyrics*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent literary studies, song lyrics have increasingly been recognized as legitimate literary texts rather than merely supporting elements of musical performance. Scholars argue that lyrics function as written texts that use poetic language, narrative suggestion, and symbolic expression to convey meaning, emotion, and lived experience. Song lyrics can be examined as literary texts because they reflect thematic, stylistic, and linguistic patterns similar to poetry, as they consist of carefully constructed language that conveys messages derived from the writer's experiences, observations, and emotions (Kaulika & Sakinah, 2025), which supports the inclusion of lyrics in literary analysis since they are shaped by deliberate linguistic choices that can be interpreted independently of melody or performance. Beyond their musical dimension, songs also serve as a form of communicative language through which creators articulate ideas, emotions, and social meanings that resonate with listeners, as music functions as a form of artistic expression that conveys deeper meanings on emotional and cultural levels (Nurazizah et al., 2025).

Research examining song lyrics from a linguistic and stylistic perspective demonstrates that the textual component of songs contains a range of stylistic features, such as metaphors, similes, repetition, imagery, and symbolic references, that enable meaning construction beyond the literal level. Stylistic studies emphasize that figurative language serves to deepen meaning and express complex emotions, as song lyrics function as a medium for expressing the songwriter's ideas and emotions, including feelings such as love, grief, and anger (Raya et al., 2025), reinforcing the idea that lyrics operate in ways similar to poetry. The presence of such devices suggests that song lyrics share key characteristics with other literary expressions, allowing researchers to focus on textual meaning, thematic construction, and layered interpretations, particularly when analyzing issues related to identity, vulnerability, and emotional insufficiency.

One of the most complex emotional landscapes captured in contemporary lyrics is the sense of self-inadequacy. Feelings of inadequacy are commonly defined in psychological research as persistent negative self-evaluations, in which individuals perceive themselves as less capable, less worthy, or insufficient in important areas of life (Kotera et al., 2022). These feelings are closely associated with negative emotional states and reduced psychological well-being. Research on self-critical cognition suggests that inadequacy is not merely a temporary mood but a relatively stable pattern that influences how individuals interpret themselves and respond to stress. For instance, feelings of inadequacy have been shown to significantly mediate the relationship between stress and depression, accounting for a substantial portion of this effect (Kotera et al., 2022). This concept is also strongly linked to low self-worth and identity-related issues, as individuals experiencing inadequacy tend to exhibit persistent negative self-perceptions, emotional distress, and diminished self-confidence (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025). Although this research is not focused on artistic contexts, it provides a clear theoretical basis for examining how similar experiences of inadequacy operate within texts or cultural artifacts.

The concept of self-inadequacy does not stem from a single theoretical framework but emerges from broader psychological discussions on inferiority, self-criticism, and negative self-evaluation. Rather than being treated as an independent theory, it is commonly situated within studies of self-concept and emotional vulnerability (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025). In this context, self-inadequacy can be understood as a pattern of repeated negative self-evaluation concerning one's worth, competence, or emotional sufficiency. Empirical research further demonstrates its significance, as feelings of inadequacy have been shown to mediate the relationship between stress and depression (Kotera et al., 2022). This indicates that self-inadequacy functions as a meaningful analytical concept for understanding emotional vulnerability and psychological struggle. This is consistent with recent findings suggesting that popular song lyrics are capable of articulating complex internal crises and identity-related struggles (Faldiaz et al., 2025).

While the psychological dimensions of self-inadequacy provide a foundational understanding of its manifestations in human experience, translating this concept into a hermeneutic framework requires a distinct interpretive shift. Rather than treating inadequacy as a measurable psychological symptom, Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach reframes it as a textually constructed condition, one that emerges not from clinical diagnosis, but from the internal organization of language, metaphor, and narrative within a written discourse. From this perspective, the expressions of emotional insufficiency found in song lyrics are not merely confessional traces of the songwriter's psychological state, but autonomous textual structures that invite interpretation and generate meaning independently of their biographical origins (Ricoeur, 1976). As (Petrovici, 2013) demonstrate, meaning in written texts does not reside transparently on the surface but is produced through layered processes of distancing, wherein the text separates itself from its author's intention and opens toward a broader field of existential signification. In this sense, the psychological patterns of negative self-evaluation described by (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025) and (Kotera et al., 2022) serve not as diagnostic categories to be applied onto the lyrics, but as conceptual entry points that help orient the reader toward the existential dimensions already embedded within the text itself. The hermeneutic arc, therefore, does not replace the psychological understanding of self-inadequacy; rather, it elevates it, transforming private emotional experience into a shared textual world that any reader may inhabit and recognize as their own.

Song lyrics in contemporary albums can be approached as connected literary texts, where each song contributes to a shared narrative and emotional perspective. One example is *Never Enough*, Daniel Caesar's third studio album released in 2023, which reflects a more introspective and emotionally open narrative compared to his previous works. Daniel Caesar's lyrical compositions are characterized by their profound poetic genuineness and the use of sophisticated metaphors to express themes of vulnerability (Neisyiah, 2024). The album is selected as the object of this research due to its cohesive lyrical structure, allowing the songs to be interpreted as a unified textual discourse rather than isolated expressions. In comparison

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with his earlier albums, "Freudian (2017)" emphasizes romantic expression and emotional exploration, while "Case Study 01 (2019)" presents a more fragmented lyrical structure. In contrast, *Never Enough* demonstrates greater continuity across songs, supporting its analysis as a cohesive textual unit.

The album *Never Enough* can be interpreted through a hermeneutic approach that views lyrical expressions of inadequacy not simply as psychological symptoms but as texts that invite interpretation and meaning-making. From this perspective, Daniel Caesar's lyrics operate as symbolic narratives in which emotional experiences are shaped through language, metaphor, and repetition. The recurring idea of "never being enough" functions as a meaningful structure that reflects how the lyrical subject understands the self in relation to love, desire, and recognition. Rather than presenting inadequacy as a fixed emotional condition, a hermeneutic reading emphasizes how these feelings are formed, reinforced, and negotiated through the album's narrative discourse. In this sense, *Never Enough* becomes an interpretive space where personal vulnerability is organized into a coherent emotional narrative that encourages reflection and understanding.

Hermeneutics is a theoretical framework for interpreting texts that focuses on how meaning is formed through the interaction between a text and its interpreter rather than through literal decoding. In the humanities, it is understood as a process that connects linguistic structures with human understanding and cultural context. Hermeneutics can be understood as an interpretive approach that pays attention to the context of language, text, and cultural meaning in order to produce deeper understanding (Petrovici, 2013). From this perspective, texts function as interpretive spaces where meaning emerges through engagement between reader and text. This view supports the treatment of Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* as a discursive text whose language and motifs invite interpretation for self-understanding. Furthermore, modern studies in language and education increasingly recognize that hermeneutics is an essential tool for unravelling hidden meanings within popular culture. Within this scope, song lyrics are treated as distinct literary forms because each lyric is "an outpouring of the personal feelings and thoughts of the creator" (Saragih et al., 2023). By employing a hermeneutic perspective, a researcher can comprehensively explore how these personal thoughts reflect wider psychological phenomena.

This study is theoretically grounded in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory, which treats song lyrics as "discourse fixed by writing" (Ricoeur, 1976). By positioning the lyrics of Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* as written discourse, this research can analyze them independently from their original performance, authorial intention, or biographical background. Central to this framework is the concept of textual autonomy, where once discourse is fixed as a text, it gains a life of its own and generates a "surplus of meaning beyond immediate communication" (Ricoeur, 1976). This autonomy allows the lyrics to be interpreted not as mere personal confessions of the artist, but as autonomous textual worlds that project complex emotional and existential experiences, specifically the theme of self-inadequacy, which can be inhabited and understood by any reader.

The analytical process follows Ricoeur's dual movement of the "Hermeneutic Arc," beginning with the stage of structural explanation. In this phase, the lyrics are treated as a structured system of meaning where the focus lies on the text's internal organization, such as word choice, metaphor, and narrative patterns (Ricoeur, 1976). This objective analysis of linguistic features serves as a necessary mediation that prevents the researcher from simply projecting personal opinions onto the text. By rigorously examining how tension and rhythm are built through structural contrasts, the explanation phase opens the way toward a deeper interpretation. It bridges the gap between what the text "says" at a linguistic level and what it "talks about" at an existential level, ensuring that the subsequent understanding is rooted in the actual formal properties of the lyrics.

The arc culminates in the stages of understanding and the "world of the text," where the analysis moves beyond analyzing language to explore deeper human experiences. To understand a text, according to (Ricoeur, 1976), is "to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says to what it talks about" (p. 87). In this research, themes of emotional

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insufficiency and unworthiness are interpreted as reflections of a broader human condition rather than isolated anecdotes. Through this interpretative engagement, the lyrics construct a "world of the text" an imaginative reality that is "neither the world of the author nor of the reader" but a new universe presented by the text itself (Ricoeur, 1976). This final stage of appropriation allows the audience to enter an emotional space where the struggle for self-worth is explored, turning the specific lyrics of *Never Enough* into a universal space for existential reflection.

To ensure that this research is a novelty, a comparison with previous studies is needed. Based on several previous studies, there are three researches that use Paul Ricoeur's literary theory. The first previous studies that is relevant to this study can be found in the journal article entitled "*Analysis of Lyrics Values Ebiel G. Ade's Song as a Source of Character Education*" by (Wibowo et al., 2019). This study analyzes the song "Untuk Kita Renungkan" using a qualitative approach that combines Levi-Strauss structural analysis and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics to identify character education values embedded in the lyrics. Although the study explicitly mentions the use of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, its application remains largely instrumental and limited to supporting structural analysis. The hermeneutic process is not developed in depth, particularly in terms of Ricoeur's key interpretive stages such as textual autonomy, metaphorical meaning, and the construction of the world of the text. As a result, the study does not fully explore how the lyrical text opens broader interpretive possibilities beyond moral categorization.

Another research that uses the theory of literary hermeneutic as its main theory is the journal article entitled "*Interpreting Love Expressions in Keshi's 'Understand' Lyrics: An Analysis Based on Paul Ricoeur Hermeneutics*" by Veronica Evelyn, published in *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* (2025). This study analyzes the lyrics of Keshi's song *Understand* using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, focusing on the dialectic between event and meaning as well as the concepts of sense and reference. However, although the study explicitly applies Ricoeur's hermeneutics, its analysis remains primarily descriptive and thematic, concentrating on love expression without systematically developing the full interpretive movement of Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc as a methodological strategy. In particular, the study does not deeply elaborate the progression from explanation lyrical structure to deeper understanding and the construction of the world of the text. This limitation indicates a research gap in which Ricoeur's hermeneutics can be applied more comprehensively and structurally to song lyrics, not only to identify themes but also to trace how meaning is produced and refigured through the text as a whole.

The last relevant previous study is the article titled "*Analisis Hermeneutika Perempuan dalam Lagu Rayuan Perempuan Gila*" by (Farhan et al., 2023). This study analyzes the lyrics of Nadin Amizah's song *Rayuan Perempuan Gila* using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, particularly the model of explanation and understanding, to examine lyrical rhetoric and the representation of women. The authors focus on how the song articulates emotional anxiety, self-disclosure, and female subjectivity through metaphorical and rhetorical language, concluding that the lyrics represent women as partners who are emotionally complex, anxious about past relational failures, yet willing to improve themselves. While the study explicitly claims to employ Ricoeur's hermeneutics, its analysis remains largely descriptive and text-centered, emphasizing line-by-line interpretation of lyrics without a deeper engagement with Ricoeur's key hermeneutic concepts such as distanciation, the autonomy of the text, or the movement from naive understanding to critical interpretation. As a result, the application of Ricoeur's theory functions more as a general interpretive label than as a rigorous philosophical framework.

Besides the methodological limitations mentioned above, there is also a clear gap in the thematic focus of previous studies on song lyrics. Most researchers usually analyze popular songs to look at general themes like romance, broken hearts, or social issues. However, they rarely explore specific psychological struggles such as the feeling of self-inadequacy in modern music. Furthermore, previous studies about Daniel Caesar's songs mostly focus on his romantic metaphors or linguistic features in his early albums. There is still a lack of research

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that specifically examines how the feelings of emotional insufficiency and loss of control are constructed in his newer works. This study aims to fill that gap by using a structured hermeneutic approach to show how contemporary pop lyrics can express these deep personal anxieties.

Based on the researches above, this study is positioned as an interpretive analysis of self-inadequacy in contemporary song lyrics. It focuses on how feelings of not being enough, emotional insecurity, and negative self-evaluation are expressed through language in Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* album. This study applies Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory as its main framework, which allows song lyrics to be treated as autonomous texts that can be interpreted beyond the author's personal intentions. The analysis aims not only to describe what the lyrics say, but also to explain how meaning is formed through language and interpretation. Rather than analyzing the entire album, this study focuses on selected songs, namely *Ocho Rios*, *Toronto 2014*, and *always*. This focused approach allows for a clearer application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory and addresses the gap in previous studies that have not fully explored song lyrics as autonomous texts with complex symbolic meanings. Consequently, this study seeks to address the following research questions: 1. How is self-inadequacy symbolically and linguistically represented in Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough album*? 2. How does the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutic strategies specifically the movement from explanation to understanding, reveal the construction of the "world of the text" regarding the subject's inadequacy?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis, as proposed by John W. Creswell, who defines research design as "a plan and procedure for research that spans the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis" (Creswell & Creswell., 2018). Qualitative design is appropriate for this study because it aims to explore and interpret meaning, experience, and social context rather than to test hypotheses using numerical data. In line with this approach, the data are analyzed inductively to understand the subjective meanings expressed in song lyrics, particularly the theme of self-inadequacy.

The data in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data consist of selected song lyrics from Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* (2023), specifically "*Ocho Rios*," "*Toronto 2014*," and "*Always*," which serve as the units of analysis. The selection of these songs is based on purposive sampling, focusing on tracks that exhibit a high intensity and variation of self-inadequacy themes. These tracks are characterized by a significant frequency of metaphors relating to dependency, temporal stagnation, and emotional subordination, providing a robust basis for thematic analysis. The lyrics are obtained from reliable online sources to ensure textual accuracy that is Genius Website. Meanwhile, the secondary data are derived from the hermeneutic theory developed by Paul Ricoeur, particularly from his works *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976) which provide the theoretical foundation for interpreting meaning in texts.

The data are analyzed using Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, which consists of four interpretive strategies. First, the text is treated as an autonomous discourse, meaning that the lyrics are analyzed independently from the author's intention or external context. Second, explanation is conducted by examining linguistic and structural elements, such as word choice, repetition, and textual patterns. Within this structural examination, metaphor serves as a figurative expression that treats the tenor and the vehicle as if they were identical, allowing abstract ideas to be understood through concrete representations (Maharani et al., 2026). Third, understanding is developed to explore the existential significance of the text, particularly the expression of self-inadequacy and emotional vulnerability. Finally, the analysis leads to the construction of the world of the text, which integrates these elements to reveal the broader emotional and experiential reality represented in the lyrics. Through these stages, the study systematically interprets how meaning is constructed within the selected songs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the manifestation of self-inadequacy across three selected tracks from Daniel Caesar's "Never Enough" album: "Ocho Rios," "Toronto 2014," and "Always." The analysis is structured to uncover how each song uniquely contributes to the overarching narrative of existential struggle, ranging from chemical dependency to temporal stagnation. By employing a Ricoeurian hermeneutic approach, the following discussion seeks to move beyond surface-level meanings to reveal the deeper, universal anxieties embedded within the lyrics. The discussion begins by establishing the theoretical ground upon which these interpretations are built.

To maintain a rigorous analytical focus, the selected tracks from the Never Enough album—"Ocho Rios," "Toronto 2014," and "Always"—are treated as autonomous texts. Following Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, these lyrics are detached from the artist's personal biography (distanciation), allowing the analysis to focus strictly on their internal linguistic structures. This approach aligns with Petrovici (2013), who argue that texts function as interpretive spaces where meaning emerges through the engagement between the reader and the linguistic structure rather than through literal decoding. Consequently, the 'I' found within these verses is examined not as the songwriter, but as a poetic subject grappling with the multifaceted nature of self-inadequacy.

Emotional instability and disorientation in "Ocho Rios" are constructed through contrasting structural and figurative devices. In the opening line, "My hair was long, but my head was low," the conjunction "but" creates a contrast between two opposing conditions: the outward growth represented by the adjective "long" and the emotional decline represented by the adjective "low." The parallel structure of the sentence highlights the imbalance between physical development and emotional condition. Similarly, the lyric "In Montego Bay in a storm of snow" uses a semantic paradox by combining two incompatible images. "Montego Bay," which is associated with tropical warmth, is placed together with "a storm of snow," an image connected to cold and harsh weather. This contrast creates an unusual and contradictory image. Across both lyrics, contrast and paradox are used to show instability in the subject's emotional and environmental condition.

Within Ricoeur's movement from explanation toward understanding, these contrasts reflect a deeper condition of self-inadequacy. In "My hair was long, but my head was low," the subject appears physically mature but emotionally burdened, suggesting that external growth does not guarantee emotional stability. This condition reflects the pattern of negative self-perception (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025). Likewise, in "In Montego Bay in a storm of snow" suggests that the subject experiences a reality that feels unfamiliar and emotionally difficult to manage. Song lyrics often express struggles related to identity and emotional alienation (Faldiaz et al., 2025). In this lyric, the impossible image of snow in a tropical place reflects the subject's sense of being emotionally out of place.

Dependency and emotional reliance in "Ocho Rios" are expressed through repetition, literal diction, and cyclical movement. In "You're my saving grace, grace, grace, grace," the metaphor "saving grace" is emphasized through the repeated use of the word "grace." The repetition strengthens the emotional intensity of the lyric and highlights the importance of the other person to the subject. In "Percocet with the Lexapro," the lyric directly combines the names of two pharmaceutical substances through the preposition "with," creating a clinical and literal expression of emotional management. Meanwhile, in "As love expires, we go back and forth," the verb "expires" presents love as something temporary, while the phrase "back and forth" creates a repetitive and non-progressive movement. Together, these lyrics use repetition, literal diction, and cyclical movement to portray emotional dependence and instability.

Within Ricoeur's framework, these lyrics reflect a subject who increasingly depends on external support to maintain emotional stability. In the first lyric, the partner becomes the subject's "saving grace," suggesting that emotional strength is placed entirely in another person. The repeated word "grace" further emphasizes the subject's emotional dependence and

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lack of self-confidence. This condition is related to the psychological pattern in which individuals experiencing self-inadequacy often seek validation and emotional support from external sources (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025). The lyric "Percocet with the Lexapro" extends this dependency into a pharmaceutical context, showing how the subject relies on external substances to manage emotional distress. Finally, the repeated motion in "As love expires, we go back and forth" reflects the subject's inability to move forward from emotional exhaustion. This repetitive emotional cycle can reflect fear of isolation and difficulty forming a stable sense of self (Faldiaz et al., 2025).

The world of the text constructed in "Ocho Rios" projects a reality in which self-inadequacy is not merely felt but structurally embedded into the subject's relationship with agency, environment, and time. Following (Ricoeur, 1976) notion that the world of the text is "neither the world of the author nor of the reader" but a new universe projected by the text itself, this projected world is one in which human agency has been displaced by dependency, on pharmaceutical substances, on an external "saving grace," and on a cyclical emotional pattern that offers no exit. The impossibility encoded in the image of snow in a tropical setting does not function decoratively; rather, it signals what (Petrovici, 2013) describes as the text's capacity to project a world where self-understanding is organized through contradiction and symbolic distortion. Within this world, the subject cannot progress because the emotional architecture of the text, its circular motion, its expired love, its repeated "grace" is built to prevent resolution. What the text ultimately projects, therefore, is a condition of ontological stagnation: a world in which inadequacy reproduces itself through the very structures meant to relieve it, offering the reader not comfort, but recognition of a shared and self-perpetuating vulnerability.

Perceptual confusion and emotional disorientation in "Toronto 2014" are expressed through metaphor, paradox, and contrasting spatial imagery. In "If only I could find a pair of glasses / To help me see the ones who truly be," the conditional phrase "if only" shows that the subject lacks something important in the present moment. The metaphor of "glasses" functions as a corrective tool, suggesting that the subject's perception is unclear and requires external assistance. The phrase "help me see" also places the subject in a dependent position, where understanding cannot be achieved independently. In "We're stuck in the Matrix, living a lie," the verb "stuck" creates a sense of immobility and limitation. The cultural reference to "the Matrix" introduces an image of artificial or false reality, while the phrase "living a lie" strengthens the idea of inauthentic existence. Meanwhile, the lyric "Cause when I'm home, I'm lost" creates a paradox by placing the word "home," commonly associated with comfort and belonging, in direct contrast with the word "lost," which suggests confusion and displacement. Through these metaphors and contradictions, the lyrics portray instability in perception, identity, and emotional belonging.

Within Ricoeur's movement from explanation toward understanding, these lyrics reflect a deep sense of self-inadequacy related to perception, identity, and emotional stability. In "If only I could find a pair of glasses," the subject appears unable to trust their own understanding of the social world and instead depends on external support to achieve clarity. Ricoeur's interpretive framework operates through structured stages of explanation and understanding, and when this movement is disrupted, the interpreter like the lyrical subject, is left without a stable ground for meaning-making (Tan et al., 2009). The lyric "We're stuck in the Matrix, living a lie" extends this condition into a broader sense of emotional and existential entrapment. The subject feels trapped in a reality that appears false and difficult to escape. According to (Faldiaz et al., 2025), song lyrics often become a medium for expressing emotional crises and feelings of alienation. Likewise, the paradox in "Cause when I'm home, I'm lost" suggests that even familiar spaces can no longer provide emotional security or identity. In this context, self-inadequacy is reflected through the subject's inability to feel stable, connected, or emotionally grounded.

Longing for a lost sense of self and the failure of social recognition are developed through temporal and spatial contrasts in "Toronto 2014." In "Back to when I was happy being me," the adverb "back" directs the subject's attention toward the past rather than the present

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or future. The phrase "when I was happy being me" presents happiness as something that existed previously but is no longer available in the present moment. The past tense verb "was" reinforces the separation between the subject's past identity and current condition. Meanwhile, in "On the other side of TVs, hoping that they see me / But, they hardly see me," the prepositional phrase "on the other side of TVs" creates a spatial distance between the subject and society. The verb "hoping" introduces expectation, but the conjunction "but" immediately weakens that expectation. In addition, the repetition of "see me" highlights the contrast between the desire for recognition and the reality of being ignored. Together, these lyrics construct feelings of nostalgia, invisibility, and emotional separation.

Within Ricoeur's framework of understanding, these lyrics reflect self-inadequacy through nostalgia and the need for recognition. In "Back to when I was happy being me," the subject compares their current condition to an idealised version of the past self, creating a sense of emotional decline and dissatisfaction. As explained by (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025), negative self-perception often develops from the gap between the current self and an imagined ideal identity. The lyric therefore suggests that the subject no longer feels comfortable with their present selfhood. Similarly, the lyric "On the other side of TVs, hoping that they see me / But, they hardly see me" reflects emotional isolation and failed recognition from others. According to (Raya et al., 2025), lyrical expression can communicate vulnerability and the fear of social invisibility. The repeated phrase "see me" emphasizes the subject's desire to be acknowledged, while also highlighting the disappointment that follows when recognition is not achieved. In this way, the lyrics portray a subject who feels disconnected both from their past identity and from the surrounding social world.

The world of the text in "Toronto 2014" constructs a reality in which the subject's inadequacy is expressed through the collapse of stable perception, temporal coherence, and social belonging. In Ricoeurian terms, the world of the text projects a possible way of orienting oneself within reality (Ricoeur, 1976), and in this song, that orientation is fundamentally broken. The subject cannot trust their own perception without external corrective tools, cannot locate themselves in the present without measuring against an idealized past, and cannot achieve recognition from a social world that "hardly sees" them. This projected world, therefore, does not merely describe displacement, it structurally enacts it. The subject is simultaneously anchored to the past through nostalgia and estranged from the present through the Matrix metaphor, producing a textual reality in which temporal and perceptual incoherence becomes the defining condition of self-inadequacy. Ricoeur's interpretive movement reveals how a text's internal structure encodes the conditions under which meaning and by extension, selfhood either stabilizes or disintegrates. In this projected world, selfhood disintegrates precisely because the subject has no reliable interpretive ground on which to stand, making "Toronto 2014" a textual map of inadequacy as epistemic collapse.

Emotional stillness and resistance to change in "Always" are expressed through spatial imagery, repetition, and contradiction. In "A space for you and me, right where you left it," the noun "space" refers to a shared emotional area between the subject and another person. The phrase "right where you left it" emphasizes that the situation remains unchanged after the other person's departure. The adverb "right" strengthens the sense of fixedness and immobility. In "I don't want things to change, I pray they stay the same always," the contrast between "change" and "stay the same" highlights the subject's rejection of emotional progression. The verb "pray" also suggests desperation and dependence, while the word "always" extends the desire for permanence. Meanwhile, in "I still remember the fussin', the fightin', the fuckin', the lyin' / It's all fine," the repeated list structure presents a series of conflicts and toxic experiences. However, the phrase "It's all fine" creates a contradiction because it minimizes the seriousness of the previous actions. Through these devices, the lyrics portray emotional stagnation and the normalization of unhealthy relationships.

Within Ricoeur's movement from explanation toward understanding, these lyrics reflect self-inadequacy through the fear of change and emotional dependence on the past. In "A space for you and me, right where you left it," the subject remains emotionally attached to a relationship that has already ended. The inability to move forward suggests that the subject

depends on past emotional connections to maintain a sense of stability. According to (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025), individuals experiencing self-inadequacy often rely on external emotional support because they struggle to develop internal confidence. Similarly, the lyric "I don't want things to change, I pray they stay the same always" shows that the subject fears emotional change and uncertainty. The subject prefers familiar pain rather than facing a new emotional reality. According to (Stoyanova & Ivantchev, 2025), negative self-perception can prevent individuals from accepting growth and change. The contradiction between the toxic memories and the phrase "It's all fine" further suggests that the subject normalizes unhealthy experiences to avoid emotional loneliness. In this context, self-inadequacy appears through the subject's willingness to remain emotionally trapped in a harmful relationship rather than confront separation and uncertainty.

Self-diminishment and emotional dependence are further expressed through metaphor, repetition, and fragmented wording in "Always." In "Losing my head over you," the phrase "losing my head" functions as a metaphor for losing emotional control and rational thinking. The continuous form "losing" suggests that the condition is ongoing rather than temporary. The phrase "over you" also directs the subject's emotional focus entirely toward another person. In "Just know I'm not a phase / I'm always, ways, ways," the phrase "not a phase" rejects the idea that the subject is temporary or unimportant. The word "always" is then broken into repeated fragments through the sequence "ways, ways." This repetition creates a rhythmic effect that emphasizes the subject's desire for permanence and recognition. Through metaphor, repetition, and fragmented wording, the lyrics portray insecurity and the fear of being forgotten.

Within Ricoeur's framework of understanding, these lyrics reflect a form of self-inadequacy in which the subject sacrifices emotional independence in order to maintain attachment to another person. In "Losing my head over you," the subject gives up emotional control and places their sense of stability entirely in someone else. As argued by (Faldiaz et al., 2025), song lyrics often communicate emotional crises and struggles with identity. The lyric therefore reflects a condition in which the subject views emotional dependence as necessary for maintaining connection. Similarly, the repeated phrase in "I'm always, ways, ways" suggests insecurity and fear of being abandoned or ignored. According to (Tan et al., 2009), individuals seek stability through repeated meaning and familiar emotional structures when they struggle to maintain internal certainty. The fragmented repetition of "ways" emphasizes the subject's attempt to convince both themselves and others that their presence is permanent and meaningful. In this way, the lyrics portray a subject who feels emotionally insecure and dependent on recognition from another person.

The world of the text in "Always" projects a reality in which self-inadequacy operates not as passive suffering but as an active, self-imposed condition, one in which the subject constructs their own stasis and then normalizes it. (Ricoeur, 1976) argues that the world of the text opens a new dimension of reality that the reader can inhabit as a space for self-understanding. The dimension opened by "Always" is one in which identity is defined exclusively through relational permanence: the subject's worth is measured not by internal growth but by their refusal to change. What makes this world analytically significant is the paradox at its core, the lyrics simultaneously acknowledge toxicity "the fussin', the fightin', the fuckin', the lyin'" and neutralize it "It's all fine, a contradiction would recognize as a textual enactment of what happens when the hermeneutic process arrests at the surface: meaning is registered but not transformed (Tan et al., 2009). Within this projected world, self-inadequacy does not appear as a crisis to be resolved but as a condition that the subject internalizes as identity. The text thus projects a world in which the very concept of self-worth has been reorganized around the avoidance of loss rather than the pursuit of growth, a world that invites the reader to recognize how inadequacy can be not only experienced, but chosen.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that self-inadequacy in Daniel Caesar's *Never Enough* is constructed as a complex and multidimensional narrative rather than a singular emotional condition. Through a Ricoeurian hermeneutic approach, the analysis shows that feelings of insufficiency are articulated through recurring patterns of dependency, stagnation, and emotional subordination, which collectively shape the subject's sense of identity and agency. Theoretically, this study contributes to the application of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in literary and music studies by demonstrating how the hermeneutic arc can be systematically applied to song lyrics as autonomous texts. Unlike previous studies that tend to remain descriptive, this research highlights the importance of integrating structural analysis with interpretive understanding to reveal the "world of the text" as a coherent framework of meaning. Practically, this study provides insight into how contemporary song lyrics function as a medium for expressing modern emotional struggles, particularly issues of self-worth, vulnerability, and dependence on external validation. This suggests that popular music can serve as a significant cultural text for understanding how individuals articulate and negotiate emotional experiences in contemporary society. Despite these contributions, this study is limited to textual analysis and does not consider performative elements such as vocal delivery, arrangement, and musical composition, which also influence meaning production. Future research is recommended to adopt a multimodal approach to further explore the relationship between lyrical meaning and musical expression.

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